

Dewhurst is disappointed voter ID measure failed

THE LEGISLATURE

But he praises the \$152.5 billion budget as success

POLLY ROSS HUGHES, Copyright 2007 Houston Chronicle Austin Bureau

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AUSTIN — Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst considers the legislative session a "success" but also says he regrets the failure of a voter identification bill that split his chamber along partisan lines.

"I was disappointed we did not get a voter ID program out there," said Dewhurst, who asserted there is evidence of "thousands and thousands and thousands" of noncitizens voting in Texas. "This is a no-brainer."

But opponents argued that such a bill would discourage low-income Texans, who tend to vote for Democrats, from going to the polls. Many such voters cannot afford to drive or to buy state-issued ID cards.

Democrats opposed the bill so fiercely that two members, Sens. Mario Gallegos of Houston and Carlos Uresti of San Antonio, risked their health to help prevent it from being voted on in the Senate.

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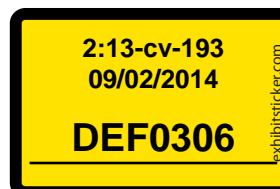
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Gallegos, who recently underwent a liver transplant, defied doctors orders that he rest at home to help prevent rejection of his new liver. Uresti, suffering with chills and the flu one day, rose from his sickbed to dash to the Senate just in time to block the bill.

"There are some members of the Senate who do not want to see a voter ID bill pass for partisan reasons, and there are some members who want to see a voter ID bill pass for partisan reasons," Dewhurst, a Republican, said Wednesday in looking back at the just-completed legislative session.

Dewhurst praised the approved \$152.5 billion state budget as the most important piece of legislation, with its increased funding for higher education, children's health insurance, property tax relief, state parks and improvements in a children's Medicaid program.

Saying "this session did more for children," he pointed to the passage of "Jessica's Law" to stiffen penalties for child-sex predators as well as reforms of the Texas Youth Commission after revelations that guards sexually abused young detainees.

Dewhurst termed a Medicaid-reform bill "revolutionary," saying it will provide more consumer choice and better benefits for the elderly, disabled and poor children. Lawmakers also approved a \$3 billion bond initiative to fight cancer, which voters must approve later this year.

"There are some things we didn't get accomplished that I'm heartbroken about," he said. He noted the failure of a bill capping college admissions under a law guaranteeing students in the top 10 percent of their class a spot at the University of Texas in Austin, as well as the failure of bills reforming charter schools and providing electric rate relief and more consumer protections.

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